

Deepening Winter Roots, Seeing the Fruits of Our Labor

Spring 2017

Nature makes trees put down deep roots before having them bear fruit, and even this is done gradually.

-Vincent de Paul

We are deep in the heart of the school year. A winter that just wouldn't quit is finally in the rear-view and there are many, many things on the horizon to look forward to in the coming months. In our last letter we spoke of the possibilities available to us in 2017, and we've been **STEAM**ing right along with the work. As excited as we are about what's in store, it's important to recognize that much of the celebration this spring will be a result of the roots that have been put down across the fall and winter.



Join D26 in redefining STEM:

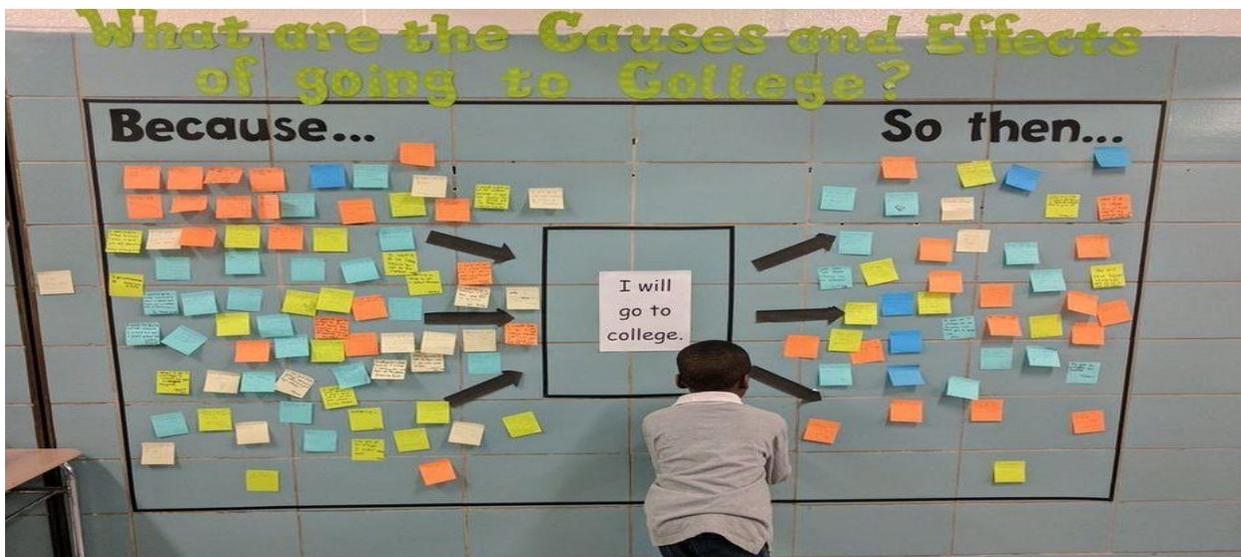
- 🔍 Scan the world for problems,
- 🧑‍🔬 Test solutions
- 🙌 Embrace Possibilities, &
- 🌍 Make a difference in the world!

Scan the World for Problems



A high quality curriculum reflects the values and priorities of the districts, schools, teachers and students that it serves.

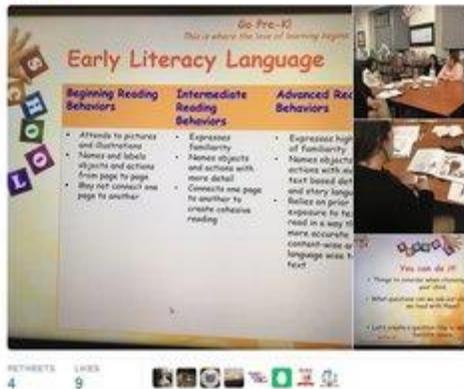
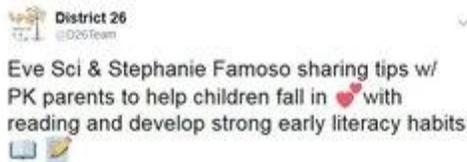
- Angela Di Michele Lalor



The above quote came from the opening remarks of our second session with Learner Center Initiatives and while at the time it was speaking to the experiences that students have in our classrooms, it is equally as important to view it as a crucible for our work as a district office. How are the experiences we create for our school leaders a reflection of our core values and priorities? Part of the answer to this question comes from the answer to another question: who owns the work? It has been an exhilarating winter as we have watched our school leaders take ownership of their professional learning at meetings and in the field.

This work was front and center at our February Principals' and March Assistant Principals' meetings, where the leaders of our district had the opportunity to brief each other on the work of their Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Our counterparts from the Queens Field Support Center were on hand (as always) to facilitate the conversation between leaders of different PLCs as they shared the key content and takeaways they've had from implementing the work of the PLCs in their schools.

We believe that learning is at its most authentic when it comes from collaboration with peers. In the past three months alone, principals have conducted seven collaborative round visits, where they have allowed themselves to be vulnerable, and invite their colleagues into their space in the service of supporting the host principal with a problem of practice. All principals participated in at least two rounds, while many participated in three!



Test Solutions

A key takeaway from the [Pre-Kindergarten Professional Learning Series](#) has been that parents deserve the same level of support as teachers. In February, Eve Sci and Stephanie Famoso hosted a workshop for parents to deepen their understanding of how their time with their children

at home can complement the literacy work being done with them during the day.

Teachers participating in our [Project-Based Learning Cohort](#) have been diligently planning the authentic experiences students will be engaging with to close out the year. Richard Schaffer has been challenging participants to think about how the world students engage with on a daily basis can serve as entry points into this work.



Our [Teacher Leaders](#) (TLs) are knee-deep in their work for the year. Maria Lam and her counterparts from the Office of Teacher Recruitment and Quality have been facilitating Communities of Practice where TLs have had the opportunity to receive peer feedback on the actions plans they have developed for deepening inquiry in their schools. Recently, their work has expanded to think about how principles of adult learning play a role in successful team experiences. We are all looking forward to their final meeting on May 22nd where they will be celebrating their journey this year!



Embracing Possibilities



“The District 26 Inter-school STEAM collaborative process literally brought life to our school community. Where, I feel, most schools started with minimal STEM knowledge, our school has been able to grow immensely. From a mission/vision to implementation in the classroom to the most important of all student engagement and excitement, this process has started something exciting in our school.” –PS 205Q

Guided by our STEAM theory of action, one of our 16-17 DCEP Goals was rooted in deepening STEM and Computer Science integration across the district through professional learning opportunities. Monthly Principal and Assistant Principal Conference activities supported their growth in utilizing transdisciplinary learning experiences in the classroom. 18 out of 26 district schools participated in the STEM sessions and 22 out of 26 district schools participated in the Computer Science sessions by sending a lead teacher plus a partner (an Assistant Principal, classroom teacher, or content specialist) to collaboratively plan for rigorous instruction. Professional Learning Sessions were supported by our Field Support Center through collaboration with two APPAs, the CS4ALL Queens North Manager, and our Field Support Liaison. Many of these STEAM activities have been [picked up by local press!](#)

When parents are engaged as equal partners in the work of the school, the sky is the limit. Parenting is a full-time job and we have spent this time between the holiday season and testing season in an effort to support parents through our Mind, Body & Spirit workshop series. This winter over 75 parents have attended workshops on Breath Work, The Mindfulness of Parenting, and Embracing Creativity through Artwork. There are two more sessions remaining in the series for this year: Yoga (April), and the Importance of Laughter

(May). Check out the [Family Engagement Page](#) for more information on this and all of our events in service of deepening the connections parents have to our district.

Make a Difference in the World



Each of the participants in our [Aspiring Leadership Program](#) (ALP) has partnered with an assistant principal in the district who has served as a mentor for a project within their school. Some ALP-ers are leading parent workshops, while others are creating experiences for their colleagues to deepen their instructional practice. We are equally excited about the work that the participants of our [District Aspiring Principal Series](#) (DAPS) have been engaging with as they define their core values as leaders. The next phase of their work will have them in live action scenarios where they will be challenged to



apply the thinking they have cultivated during the winter. We are looking forward to hearing more about the impact of both groups' work in our spring visits around the district!

The [Student Leadership Program](#) spent the winter being inspired and inspiring others. Anthony Lemma Sr. (Assemblyman Weprin's office) and Anthony Lemma Jr. (Congresswoman Meng's office) visited with our district's student leaders to share their journeys of leadership, public service, and advocacy. The group also had one of its tent-



pole events this January when fifth and eighth grade Student Council Presidents and their liaisons traveled to the Ronald McDonald House in Manhattan to get an in-person sense of the kind of work that RMH-NY does for families in need. We are overwhelmed by the work done by leaders within their buildings in support of this cause, but not nearly as floored as RMH-NY Officer Jim Molloy was when we presented him with a check for **\$14,538.60!** Our district's generosity will go a long way in the service of others. The second

tent-pole event for the Leadership Program is the Queens Family Charity Fun Run/Walk on Saturday, April 29th. [Registration for the event is open now!](#)

Hope Springs Eternal

The unpredictability of the weather has not significantly impacted PS 376's progress towards coming online this September, and what a busy season it has been for our newest addition! While the body of the building is almost finished, we are so proud of the work that [Project Director Clara Kang](#) has done to begin to develop the heart and soul of our newest place for the nurturing and development of young minds. Clara was formally introduced to the CDEC, District Leadership Team, President's Council, and District Principals across their meetings in February. In addition to meeting the major stakeholder groups, she has been on hand to welcome many of the families who are taking the loving leap with us into this new enterprise. The picture to the right is the first family registered to be part of our rapidly growing community.

As part of her planning, she has recruited a Working Group of stakeholders from across the district. It is her intent to utilize their local knowledge and experience to craft the school's mission and vision in addition to



serving as a thought partner for a host of other topics related to the creation of a new school. The group has already met twice, and has supported Ms. Kang in infusing the core belief of caring into the mission and vision, as well as helping her craft questions for prospective hires as she begins the process of hiring the inaugural teaching staff. Check back to the [New School's Page](#) on our website to stay in the loop as PS 376 becomes a reality.

Outside the district office, one can see the little buds on all of the branches. Before we know it we'll be back here with our Summer '17 letter, highlighting all of the celebrations that are the hallmark of the ending of another year of excellence in District 26. Even though we are in the throes of the work that will be celebrated across May and June, take time to reflect on all of the hard work that you are doing in service of our children. Leverage every moment as an opportunity to embrace what is great about this work, and if you see something great, let us know about it! You are the best eyes and ears a district team could possibly have. We want to embrace the innovation you see in teaching and learning alongside you. Since we can't be everywhere, please continue to [engage with the District Team on Twitter](#) so we can continue to be partners in this journey.

With warmer days ahead, clear eyes, and full hearts, we can't lose.

Danielle Giunta, Superintendent, and the District 26 Team